

'Wheaties' aren't going to make a collector rich

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers questions from Chicago Tribune readers:

Q—During the past decade, we've saved more than 200 "wheat cents" from circulation. How much could we get if we sold them?

C.N., Elmhurst

A—Most local dealers aren't buying the common dates, such as circulated specimens of nearly all "wheaties" made between 1940 and 1958. Although such coins retail for about 5 cents each, dealers have ample quantities in stock, or they can quickly obtain additional supplies by paying less than 1½ cents per coin.

Some of the earlier specimens are more valuable, especially those showing little or no wear. In "typical uncirculated condition," the rarest regular-issue Lincoln cent is the 1914-D [a "wheat cent"], which retails for \$900 or so.

Uncle Sam issued Lincoln cents with the wheat design—so-called because two ears of wheat are depicted on the tails side—from 1909 to 1958. Officials switched to the Lincoln Memorial image in 1959 as a way to mark Abe's 150th birthday.

Q—What is the value of a 1921 Liberty-head silver dollar in mint condition? The back side has an eagle with spread wings but no mint mark.

L.T., Oglesby, Ill.

A—You own the most common old dollar coin, which contains .77 of an ounce of silver. Your piece would retail for about \$25; specimens worn from circulation go for \$14 or so.

Q—I have a 1964-D Lincoln cent that has two extra 4s, one just below and the other just to the right of the 4 in the date. The rest of the design is normal. Should I start planning my retirement?

J.J., Chicago

A—No. Most likely, a prankster using special tools added those extra digits to your coin. Experts say there's almost no chance that government machines could create such an error, given modern-day minting procedures. Check the coin under high magnification for signs of tampering.

Questions about coins or currency? Send your queries to Roger Boye, The Arts, The Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a personal reply and allow at least four weeks for the answer.